Estimate That Tiny Immigrants Enrich Nation by Over $230,000,000 Yearly

Little Tragedies and Comedies Galore Attend Entrance of Alien Children Into This Country.

ILLITERATE, penniless, utterly dependent immigrants! Every one of the group that caught and held the eye of the cabin passenger at the rail above was physically and mentally undeveloped, many unable even to talk intelligibly, all under sized, some feeble to the point of inability to walk.

Pretty nearly every quality that immigration authorities condemn! And yet these were confidently sailing up New York Bay, soon to be received by Uncle Sam with open arms.

There were many others of the same class scattered about the steerage deck, clad in the regalia of many nations, wandering in apparent oblivion of the significance of their condition.

On the faces of their more responsible companions were printed hope and fear commingled. They were nearing this land of new opportunities, the goal of years of toil. Yet there was the fear that on the threshold they might be turned back.

Not so these others. They understood faintly, if at all, the conflicting emotions of their fellow passengers. And yet it was not the stalwart and self-reliant ready-made citizen that most strongly claimed the cabin passenger's interest. It was these helpless ones. They are the immigrant children—the paradox of the immigration problem and one of its most important features, the main reason for immigration and the best reason for allowing it.

The best time for a nation to mould a new citizen is before the stamp of the homeland has become fixed. To-day we know that environment counts for more than birth in the building of character. The younger the new citizen is on his arrival the better his chances of development along American lines.

Irving Fisher, professor of political economy at Yale, estimates that a child is worth $2,900 net—that is, if he lives out the normal term of years he can produce on the average that much more wealth than it costs to rear and maintain him. Multiply that by eighty thousand or more, the number of immigrant children furnished us each year, and we see what this phase of the problem means in dollar signs.

But to return to the little group on the steerage deck. The ship was nearing Quarantine. Filled with vague stories of prodding, prying, forbidding doctors, the children crowded to the rail. They stood back in awe as the khaki-clad physician came aboard. A little Italian hastily looked over his ill fitting suit, patted it out, brushed off some dust, made sure his funny little flat derby was on straight, then stood with gritted teeth till the dread doctor had passed him. Another politely took off his cap. Several little girls made queer, obsequious courtesies. All were very anxious to please.

At length the big ship moved on to her dock in the North River. Like a flock of bewildered sheep the children were herded aboard clumsy white barges and taken over to that island with the big red buildings they had seen when coming in. Many were straining their eyes for a first sight of a father or big brother who, they expected, would be there to meet them, and wondering how they would find them in all that excitement.

It was a wavering, broken, many-colored, silent line. Babies, blinking patiently in the bright sun, were hugged close. One couldn't help wondering if the big hoods and woollen mitts and layers of clothing, often topped off by an afghanlike cover of coarse lace, tied at the bottom, didn't seem terribly uncomfortable. Little boys manfully stubbed along in high boots weighing almost as much as themselves. A little Olga lagged momentarily to refasten her yellow kerchief with huge red dots that was tied over flaxen hair. Then, smothering her big, beruffled bib apron, she smiled at her mother, who, she thought, looked especially well in a magenta basque and short sateen skirt. She had a new apron, too, only hers was embroidered.

Two little girls, in gay plaid dresses reaching to their heels, were admiring the astrakhan cloak and red wool scarf of their small neighbor in the line. Most had bundles, none had dolls or toys. All kept close to parent or guardian. There were seven thousand immigrants to be handled before night.

To the visitor who enjoyed the unusual privilege of watching the inspection that followed within the great red building the proceedings seemed as harsh and unfeeling as if so many helpless little sheep were being assorted for market. No wonder the tiny newcomers shrank and trembled at each ordeal. But, after all, the harshness of the great human culling machine was only in seeming. Nowhere was there any real unkindness shown by the swiftly working, tired looking officials. Sometimes, even, there was a friendly, reassuring pat on a shrinking curly head or a slap on a manly little shoulder as it swayed by under the weight of a heavy hamper. But when seven thousand human beings must be passed on in a day there is not much time for the expression of sentiment.

There were looks of concern on the faces of each little group as inspector No. 1 unceremoniously grabbed the paper held by the head of the family and shoved them forward. Physician No. 1 was the next lion in the path. Each little chest was tapped in turn and a keen glance was directed into each little face. Before they had time to sigh their relief physician No. 2 was at them. This was a lot worse. Almost before they knew it eyelids were being turned back from scared little eyes—just why, they couldn't imagine. Then there was inspector No. 2. They were getting pretty scared by now, but he wasn't so bad, after all. There was just a keen glance and a shove, and on they went.

It did seem good now to meet kindly matron No. 1, who with a pat and a smile, helped them on to the next ordeal. At the top of a long stairway was one of the biggest rooms the little strangers had ever seen. There were rows and rows of seats, all of them full of people just like themselves. Maybe they were late! Was there room in America for all those folks? They were shut in by a big wire fence. Was this a prison? Why were the "ladies and gentlemen" watching them in the balcony over their heads? Perhaps they were just looking at that great, beautiful red, white and blue flag, with the stars in the corner of it, at the end of the room.

Now it was their turn to move along. One little family at a time stood before a desk at the end of the room, where a stern inspector leaned over a large book. He talked in their own language. That seemed better. He asked ever so many questions and kept writing in that big book. Why was father giving all his papers and money to the man? Did folks have to pay to get into America? But the man just looked at them and gave them all back. That seemed good of him.

Word passed along the line that they were all through with doctors and inspectors and things and were soon to take the ferry for New York. But that was only for the fortunate. Back along the straggling line many a little shoulder bore a heart-breaking, white chalked cross. Those who were marked that way were to be detained for special investigation.

That led the visitor to the detention room. At the doorway wails of grief were heard. A sympathetic matron was trying to comfort a bereft mother, whose agonizing appeals went straight to the heart. Two months ago she and her baby and husband arrived. The future seemed bright, for he had work waiting for him in Jersey City, where a brother had secured employment.

At the island the baby showed symptoms of disease. The father went on to his work and the mother remained. The doctor's fears were realized—baby had scarlet fever. Alone, it had to go from its mother's arms to the hospital at Hoffman Island. Had it been a nursing baby she might have gone, too, but this baby was feeding from a bottle. Alone, she sat with empty arms and waited. Daily children came from the hospital, restored to health, and she watched the joyous reunions with their mothers. The days dragged by. She grew haggard from anxiety. Every attendant was constantly plied with inquiries about her babe. She searched their faces as they told her to wait; that the child was very sick; it would take time. Often as he could the father came. Her fears were not allayed. That morning, with spring sunlight flooding the room and prattling babies all around her, she learned that the disease had won the victory.

At the far side of the room an olive-skinned mother, with huge golden balls dangling from her ears, was teaching a wabbly-legged daughter to walk. On the floor near by sat a ring of happy tots, getting endless fun out of a box and a bright ball. Six nationalities were represented by the group, yet there was perfect harmony. They had learned the secret of having a good time. "Buster," the precocious eighteen-months-old tot from Christiania, was one of the most popular. A wee French baby, with pink, bare toes, received many awkward caresses from stranger children, undismayed by the irritable manner of the mother, who was weary from the care of five others. On the benches lay dreaming infants, most of them fat and healthy looking, the majority swathed in numberless garments, all of them unconscious of the noise around them.

Tragedies are of daily occurrence. The case of Mrs. Margaret Burke is one of the saddest. Her husband came over and worked as a mason till he could send for her and their three children. When she landed the boys were found to have scarlet fever and soon afterward both of them died. The third child, a little girl, had diseased eyes and had to be deported. So the grief-stricken mother went back, leaving the husband to follow as soon as he had the money.

A visitor having the rare privilege of watching the special inquiry found herself many times getting all choky over pathetic little dramas enacted there. Here were a woebegone trio listening helplessly to a rapid fire of questions from the Russian interpreter. There was a gaunt, overgrown boy, who admitted he was only fourteen, though hard work and privation had seared his face. He was in charge of his little sisters, six and four years old, respectively.

"The mother was to meet them and has not," the interpreter explained to the judge. Three days they had waited. The tear-stained, dirty little faces were eloquent of what it all meant.

Once more the blue-coated messenger called their names through the open door. This time there was a shrill cry in answer. A hysterical woman rushed through the door and toward the three children. The face of the boy lighted with joy, but the little girls looked on, stolidly indifferent.

The woman was checked by an officer. She said she was the mother. That was not enough. She had to prove her claim. Many wiles are practised on the watchers of the island, but already the gaunt, ill-clad figure, with its yearning, half fearful glances, so full of long thwarted mother love, had won its case.

However, technicalities must be satisfied.

"Are these your children?" demanded the judge.

The interpreter repeated the question.

"Yes," sobbed the mother. "Their father died. I left them with an aunt, and came here to earn enough to bring them over. Now the aunt is dead and I had to send for them. I did not know what boat they came on."

"Where do you work?"

"In a mill in Lawrence."

"How much do you earn?"

"Six dollars a week."

"How much money have you?"

"Fifty-two dollars here and $125 in the bank. This bankbook shows it."

She handed the purse and bankbook confidently to the judge and turned again to the children.

But there were still other questions, and the interpreter sharply reminded her that she must pay attention to the court. At length the judge was satisfied.

"All right," he said, and turned to another case.

"Take them home," said the interpreter, pointing to the children.

The pent-up torrent broke loose. With another hysterical cry the mother drew the boy toward her, while she nearly smothered the little girls with passionate caresses.

Suddenly she was silent. The little girls did not know her. They were babies when she left them and she was a stranger now. They shrank away. Was this only another strange woman going to give them orders? The mother broke down in tears.

"They have forgotten me!" she wailed.

The boy bent over and whispered a word to his sisters. In a flash two pairs of arms were around the weeping woman's neck.

Sometimes a father has come to this far land to earn the passage money for his family. Before that great day arrives the mother has migrated to a further land and the sorrowing father must meet a little group of orphans.

And not all these little waifs meet the requirements of Uncle Sam. Perhaps the parent or relative who meets them cannot show he is financially able to support them. Sometimes they have been left as orphans on the hands of a grudging relative in the old country who thinks to be rid of them by sending them over here to some supposititious kinsman, willy nilly. In many such cases the hapless youngsters are not met at all, and after days of detention they are sent again on that seasick, homesick voyage to the inhospitable place whence they came.

Feeblemindedness, one of the most frequent causes of deportation, is the hardest to detect in the case of children. Actual imbecility and idiocy are comparatively easy to discover. In the public schools are found many mentally deficient children of foreign birth who through haste or the difficulty of making such test have been passed by the immigration authorities.

On a bench in a long corridor the visitor saw a disconsolate group—father and mother and daughter of ten. The parents were weeping; the child seemed stolid. Now and then the mother would dry her own eyes and try to console her husband, whose grief was beyond control. He buried his face in toil-gnarled hands and shook with sobs. They had reached the meridian of life, toiling, struggling, hoping. They were being turned back just when the dawn of a new beginning was at hand. The effort had been in vain. Over at the hospital the child had been judged defective. They could not separate from their only one. If she must go back their hearts took them with her.

Politeness is especially noticeable among all the children. Parents demand respect. Each nationality has its own distinctive form of courtesy. For a slight favor the Polish child not only says "Thank you" but respectfully kisses his benefactor's hand. Give a bright-eyed little Italian an orange and he will not forget to say "Grazie!" Remember a playful Hungarian with even so little as a bright picture, and he will smilingly express appreciation by kissing your hand—a custom of most Slavic races. Many of the little German boys wear sailor suits, and with great dignity the military salute is given by these little fellows when spoken to.

Istvan, a little four-year-old Hungarian boy, has been a favorite recently at Ellis Isldan, where his quaint figure became well known among those detained. "Here I am!" has been his daily cheerful salute to one of the missionaries adored by children because of her sympathetic understanding. The other day he was troubled and sought her. "I want to buy an apple and an orange," said he, "but my money isn't right," and he displayed some worn coins of his home country. She offered him a dime and told him to run along. But he wanted a square deal. "No, that wouldn't be right," he assured her. "I cannot take your money unless you take mine for it."

The exchange was seriously made. Soon he returned. "See," he confided, "I got my apple and orange. I won't eat all my orange to-day. It would be waste. I will eat half of it to-day and save half for to-morrow."

A Polish mother arrived at the island with her seven-year-old boy and daughter of five. The children were detained, as the mother had been taken ill and was in the hospital. They needed a thorough scrubbing. First the boy was taken to the bathroom. Frightened by the novel proceeding, he violently resisted the attendant. Finally, persuaded by bribes of toys, he submitted, and when he returned to his sister she did not know him. Her admiration of her brother in this new state of cleanliness made her fairly anxious to try the beautifying process. She was rewarded with a fine rag doll.

When the mother returned from the hospital she did not recognize her own children, cleanliness had so changed their appearance. She was much impressed and actually asked her for a bath herself.

But from the sorrows of the detention quarters the visitor turned with relief to the big waiting room, where there were fortunate children a-plenty, tagged and baggaged and all ready and impatient for the long railroad journeys to various parts of the great new country. A roly-poly Lithuanian of five, tagged for Dakota, was

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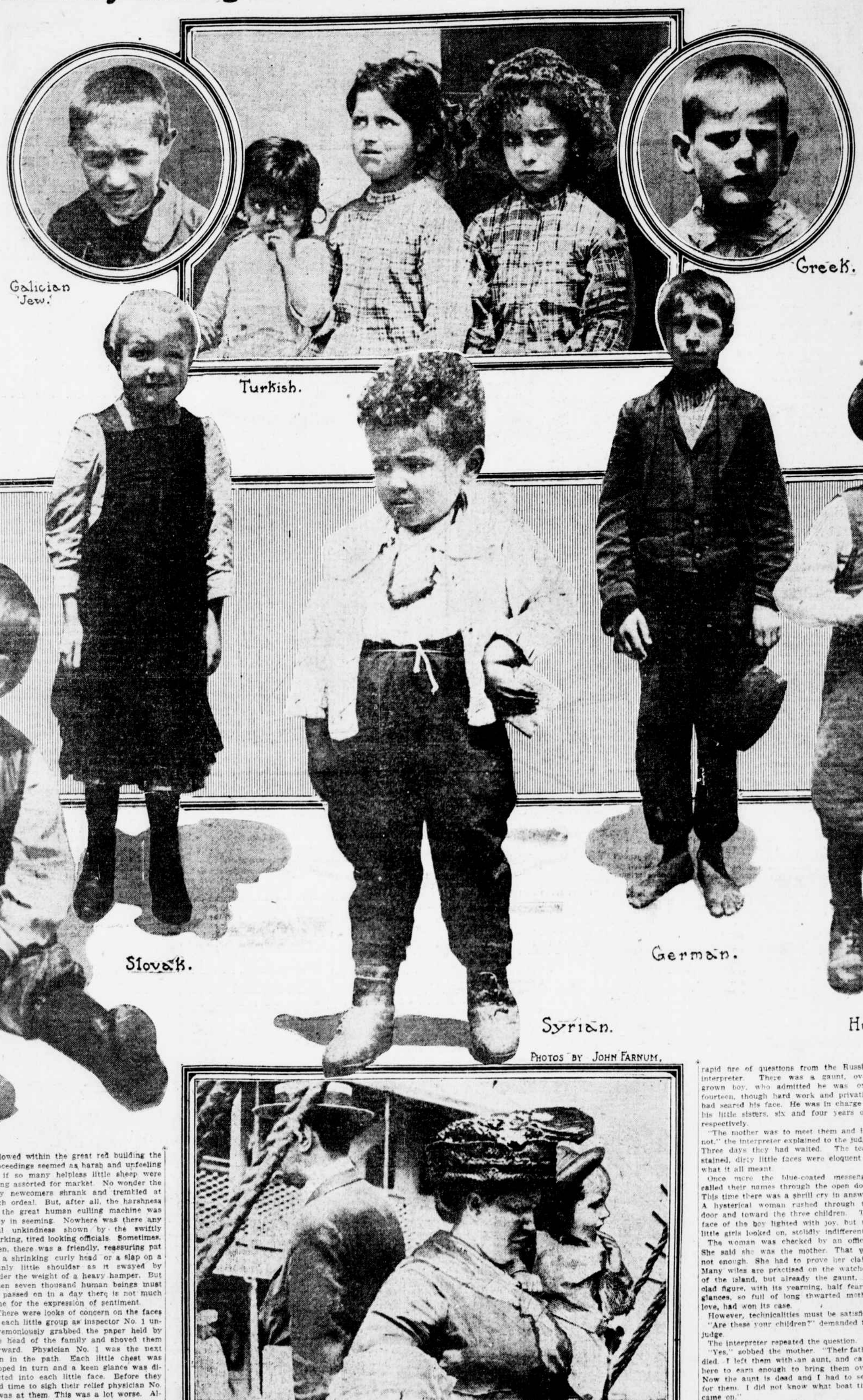
When They Have Passed Uncle Sam's Tests That New Relative Does His Best to Look After Them.



PHOTOS BY JOHN FARNUM.

Russian Jews